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LOGISTICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PANHANDLE OF
NORTH VIETNAM AND LAOS,
MAY 1969

Project No. 54.5285

30 June 1969

OSD REVIEW COMPLETED

DIA review(s) completed.

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Logistical Developments in the Panhandle of
North Vietnam and Laos,
May 1969

Summary

During May the Communists were able to move into Laos the second largest monthly total of supplies of the 1968-69 dry season despite heavy rains associated with the arrival of the Southwest Monsoon in the latter part of the month. The heavy May traffic -- April is usually the peak month -- probably represented the final surge before the full impact of the wet season is felt on the logistic system in Laos. Total tonnage moved during the October-May period probably was up by as much as 20 percent over last year.

The continued high rate of allied air attack against supply routes and the onset of wet weather both had a disruptive effect on truck traffic in Laos. However, enemy supplies continued to move along the main routes from North Vietnam through the Panhandle to South Vietnam and, as a result of continued road improvements, logistical activity almost certainly will continue throughout the rainy season as it did last year.

In the North Vietnamese Panhandle, logistic activity increased considerably during May. Coastal shipments were at the highest level since January and rail activity, including new construction of spur-lines and rail transshipment point warehouses, was higher than has been evident for several months. Although little logistical activity was noted on routes immediately north of the DMZ, the movement of supplies on the main roads leading toward Southern Laos continued

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heavy.

North Vietnam

There was a noticeable increase in logistical activity in the North Vietnamese Panhandle during the month of May. This activity was most evident in a high level of rail activity south of Thanh Hoa and a sharp increase in coastal shipping. The rail activity consisted of the construction of rail spurs, new storage buildings at rail transshipment points, and a general overall increase in rail transshipment activity. Truck activity, however, did not vary significantly from that noted in recent months. Although some increase in traffic was noted around Quang Khe which probably was related to an increase in shipping to the port, the heaviest concentration of vehicles noted in photography* continued to be on Route 15 and 137, the main access routes into Laos. Little traffic was noted in the vicinity of the DMZ.

Shipping off the coast of southern North Vietnam was higher than for the past several months but was still well below the level established immediately after the November, 1968 bombing halt

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Further south

* The weather over the southern panhandle of North Vietnam was generally poor during May. Tactical air reconnaissance missions decreased from 316 in April to 271 in May. However, the number was well above the 186 missions in March and 72 in February.

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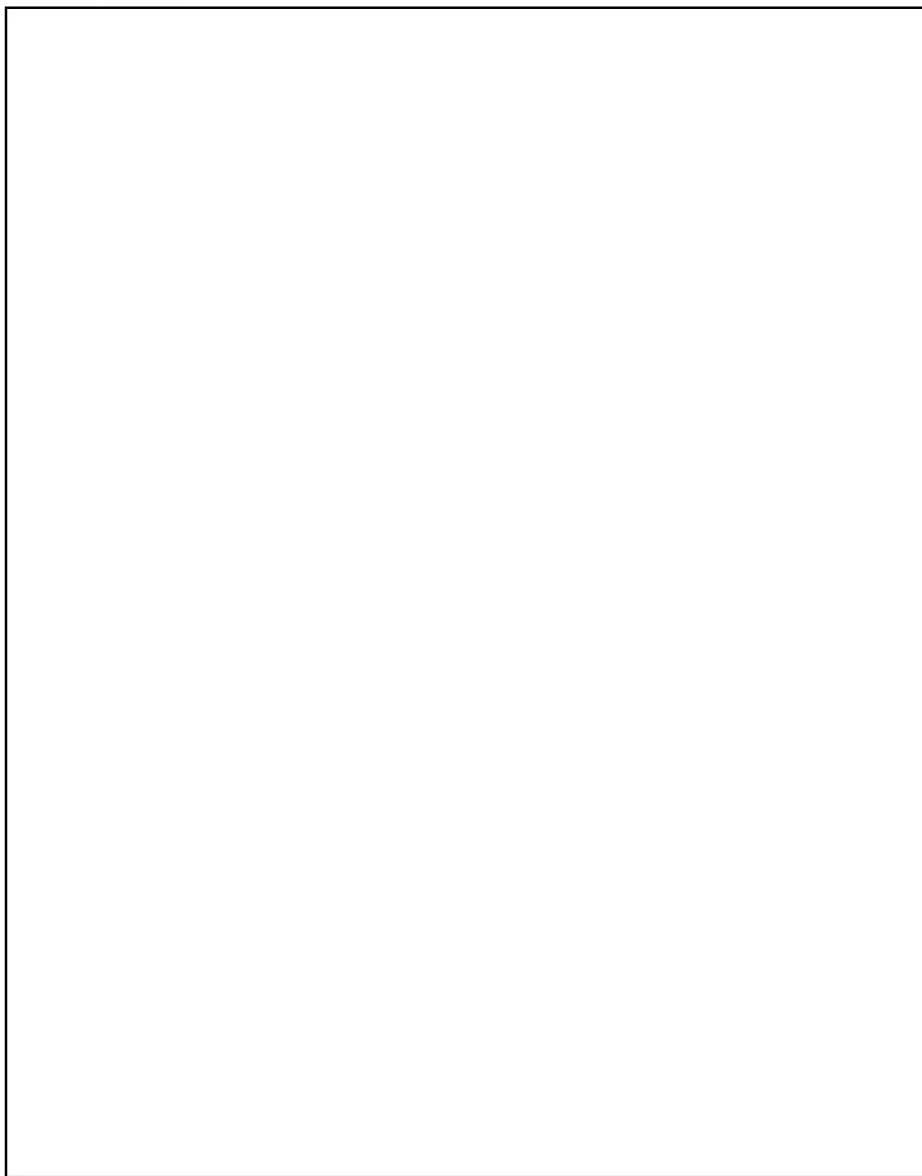
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at Quang Khe, coastal transshipment activity was the highest evident
since January.

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Road construction and repair activities throughout the Panhandle of North Vietnam continued during May. The major effort, however, still centered in the western DMZ area. Currently, Routes 1036 and 1039 (the latter was formerly designated 1038) extend several miles into Laos, and Route 1032 is motorable into the DMZ. However, none of the three routes are yet fully tied into the Laotian roadnet.

During the month the Communists continued to make improvements to the petroleum pipeline in North Vietnam. Photography [] revealed POL rail tank cars at a recently constructed POL storage site on the newer of two pipeline segments linking Vinh to the main north-south line. Petroleum is now being brought south by rail as well as by coastal tankers to Vinh and fed into the pipeline system. The North Vietnamese may also be planning to link the main pipeline with the Dong Hoi area. [] photography revealed stacks of POL pipe stored near Dong Hoi, and southbound trucks carrying POL pipe were observed southwest of Dong Hoi. Subsequent photography, however, has failed to reveal new pipeline construction in these areas. In Laos, no further extension of the pipeline was noted during May. The line was attacked during the month, however, and post-strike photography revealed considerable damage to portions of the line, including several fires.

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Laos

During May, the estimated tonnage of supplies moved into the Lao-tian Panhandle was the second largest monthly total of the 1968-69 dry season and was more than double that of May 1968. During the eight month period October 1968 through May 1969 the Communists probably were able to move as much as 20 percent more tonnage into the Panhandle as they did a year earlier [REDACTED]

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Moreover, as we noted in our last assessment, the proportion of non-POL tonnage entering southern Laos probably has increased in recent months because of the opening of the military petroleum pipeline near Route 15 during the first quarter of this year.

a. Access Routes

Truck movements as noted by all sources indicated continued heavy enemy truck traffic on the roads south of both Mu Gia and Ban Karai Passes, the two main entry points into Laos. (May traffic through Mu Gia, for example, was almost double that of a year ago.) Traffic on the northernmost access route through Nape Pass continued to be light during the month according to roadwatch data and pilot sightings. Our information on the new southernmost access routes near the DMZ continues to be fragmentary and incomplete, with no ground or air sightings available. [REDACTED]

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b. Within the Panhandle

Despite a continued high rate of allied air attack and the onset of the wet season during May, enemy truck movements in the Lao-tian Panhandle continued to follow the main routes from North Vietnam through the Panhandle to South Vietnam. Pilot sightings of trucks decreased during the month primarily as a result of a 14 percent drop in attack sorties flown. Although down from April, the sortie rate nevertheless continued at a high level and May 1969 sightings were well above those in May 1968 (see Appendix A, Table 3). Air sightings also continued to indicate that the principal exit point of supplies into South Vietnam was along Route 922 into the A Chau Valley. However, other indicators show that supplies have continued to move down through the Panhandle to the tri-border area.

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Allied air attacks also had an important impact on the flow of material this past month.*

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during the eight month period October 1968 - May 1969

it is estimated** that the Communists had some 4,700 trucks destroyed, down only slightly from the 4,800 destroyed during the comparable period of a year earlier, despite a shift in attack emphasis this year to fixed targets.

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* See Appendix B, for a brief assessment of the results of air attacks on fixed targets in the Laotian Panhandle.

** Pilot reports of trucks destroyed and damaged were deflated on the basis of an agreed CIA/DIA formula that calculates losses as 75 percent of those trucks that pilots report as having been destroyed and 25 percent of those reported damaged. This deflation allows for some duplication and inaccuracies in pilot reports and recognizes the known ability of the Communists to repair damaged trucks. Despite this adjustment it is entirely possible that the truck loss estimates are still exaggerated and inflate the estimate of enemy supply losses.

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APPENDIX A

Table 3

Truck Statistics - Laotian Panhandle
Daily Averages

| | <u>May 69</u> | <u>May 68</u> | <u>1 Oct 68-</u> <u>31 May 69</u> |
|---|---------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| Sighted | 228 <u>a/</u> | 194 | 225 |
| Destroyed | 31 <u>a/</u> | 18 | 23 |
| Damaged | 12 <u>a/</u> | 3 | 8 |
| Attack Sorties Laotian Panhandle <u>b/</u> | 322 | 103 | 374 |

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APPENDIX B

Results of Air Attacks on Fixed Targets in the Laotian Panhandle

The arrival of the rainy Southwest Monsoon during the middle of May adversely affected air operations and contributed largely to the general decrease in reported damage to the fixed target system under attack in Laos. Armed reconnaissance sorties fell 14 percent below the level in April while total incidents of reported damage dropped nearly 40 percent compared with the April total. May's rate of attack and reported damage also slipped below the monthly average figures noted since November, 1968 (see Table below). The prevailing poor weather conditions expected over Laos for the next several months should cause this decline to continue through September. In past years, both enemy activity and allied air strikes in Laos have been conducted at significantly reduced levels during this period of inclement weather. However, photography has indicated that extensive measures have been instituted by the North Vietnamese to keep their logistic system in the Panhandle functioning this rainy season as they did last year. Many vulnerable road sections have been corduroyed, road banks and fords reinforced, and numerous piles of aggregate have been strategically placed alongside the major roadways.

Road segments, storage areas, truck parks and anti-aircraft weapon positions continued to be the principal targets attacked. Most of the attack effort (and reported damage) occurred along the major

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infiltration routes below Mu Gia and Ban Karai Passes, and further south near Tchepone and along Route 922 leading into the A Shau Valley.

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APPENDIX B

Table 1

Fixed Targets Destroyed and Damaged by Armed Reconnaissance
Attacks in the Steel Tiger Area of the Laotian Panhandle*

| <u>Target</u> | <u>May</u> | <u>April</u> | Monthly Average Since 1 <u>Nov 68</u> | 1 Nov 1967- 31 May 1968 |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--|----------------------------|
| Road Segment | 463 | 786 | 676 | 563 |
| Truck Parks | 125 | 186 | 236 | 177 |
| Water Crossing Facilities | 72 | 88 | 80 | 88 |
| AAA/Auto. Weapons Sites | 448 | 547 | 359 | 187 |
| Storage Facilities/Mil Complexes | 385 | 491 | 348 | 169 |
| Bunkers/Structures | 244 | 313 | 194 | 152 |
| Total | 1737 | 2411 | 1893 | 1336 |
| Armed Reconnaissance Sorties | 9790 | 11,180 | 11,760 | 5600 |
| B-52 Sorties ** | 175 | 740 | 600 | 190 |

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